بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

In the name of Allāh, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful

Topic of Discussion: The Characteristics of a True Believer
Ḥadīth #13 [Discussion #15] – Part 2

Lectures on Akhlāq given by His Eminence
Ayatullāh al-ʿUẓmā al-Ḥājj ash-Shaykh Nāṣir Makārim ash-Shīrāzī (may Allāh protect him)

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Topic: The Characteristics of a True Believer – Part 2

Introduction to the Discussion:

In our previous ethical discourse, we related a Ḥadīth from the Noble Prophet (blessings of Allāh be upon him and his family) which he conveyed to Imām ʿAlī (prayers be upon him) in which the Prophet (blessings of Allāh be upon him and his family) mentioned that a true believer would not be considered as such until he possess one hundred and three characteristics and these characteristics could be divided up into five categories. In our previous discussion, we explained what these five categories were and now, we relate five (more) of the characteristics.

Text of the Ḥadīth:

...كريم ٱلمراجعة، أوسع ٱلناس صدراً، أذلّهم نفساً، ضحكه تبسماً، و ٱجتماعه تعلماً...

Translation of Ḥadīth: *"(The true believer is one who possesses) noble interactions (with others), his (spiritual) bosom is the most expansive of all other people, his soul is the most humbled (of others), his laughing is done (only) with smiling (not out loud) and his gathering (with others) is (only) in order to learn something… "*[1]

Commentary of Ḥadīth:

The sixth characteristic of the true believer is that he possesses [كريمة المراجعة] – meaning that his interactions with others is of a noble nature. This line actually has two meanings:

1. The meetings or interactions that the people have with him are very dignified and venerable – meaning that when they want to meet him, if he has the ability, he meets with them or he gives them a promise that in the future, he will meet with them. If these are not possible then he excuses himself that he will not be able to meet with them. In these regards, the Qurʾān states:

قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّن صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَآ أَذًىٰ

[1] Biḥār al-Anwār, Volume 64, Section of the Signs of a True Believer, Page 310, Ḥadīth 45

"Speaking a good word (to others) and asking forgiveness (from them) is better than charity that is followed up by aggravating (the other person)."[2]

2. When such a person goes to meet other people, he does so with nobility and dignity. By this we mean that if he needs something from another person, he requests it from him with the proper etiquette - not that he is forceful or persist in asking the person for a particular thing. Thus, he does not impose himself on the other person and then due to humility, the other person is forced or compelled to give him what he wants.

The seventh characteristic of the true believer is that of [أوسع الناس صدراً] or that he is one whose (spiritual) bosom is expansive – meaning that his heart is much more (spiritually) open than all other people. In relation to the spiritual openness of the heart, the Qur'ān states that:

فَمَنْ يُرِدِ ٱللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهَ لِلإِسْلاٰمِ وَ مَنْ يُرِدِ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقاً حَرَجاً

"So then that person whom Allāh intends (that person who is deserving of guidance) to guide (to the Truth) – he opens his heart up (to receive) al-Islām and whoever he intends (that person who is not deserving of guidance) to leave in misguidance, he constricts his heart."[3]

What is the true meaning of having an expansive chest (سعه صدر)? Those people who possess an expansive (spiritual) bosom are able to endure anything that happens to them (things one does not enjoy, difficulties, times of trial) and is a person that is not affected by people speaking bad about him and is also one who does not become hopeless quickly. He is a person who takes in knowledge and information of various types and if a person was to speak or do something bad to such a person he would keep this in the back of his mind and would not fill his head with the bad things that happen to him. However the person who has a constricted (spiritual) bosom (ضيق الصدر) is the person who, when afflicted with the smallest difficulty becomes upset and does not have the ability to accept and handle trials and tribulations.

The eighth characteristic is that of [أذلهم نفسا] or one whose soul is humbled. In the language of the ʿArabs, the word [ذلت] means humility and the meaning of the word [ذلول] is that of one that is disciplined. However in Persian, the word [ذلت] carries with it a very negative connotation – thus, it should be said that this characteristic is in the meaning of humility meaning that the true believer has extreme humility and is humble in the presence of other people. Whether the other person is great or insignificant, he respects everyone and he does not wait or expect that others should show respect to him (first).

The ninth characteristic of a true believer is that he possesses the trait of [ضحكه تبسما] meaning that the true believer does not laugh with a loud voice. It has been mentioned in the Ḥadīth that the Prophet (blessings of Allāh be upon him and his family) never laughed with a loud voice – thus, even the laughing of a true believer is done with dignity and through following etiquette.

The tenth characteristic of the true believer is that he possesses that trait of [اجتماعه تعلما] meaning that when the true believer is sitting in a gathering, he strives to learn and gain knowledge in something and does not busy himself with back biting and other things which do not pertain to him and which have absolutely no benefit.

…and all praise belongs to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds, only the mistakes are mine. (Tr.)

[2] Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 263
[3] Sūrah al-Anʿām, Verse 125